



## Communist University Introductions

*These texts may be used as “openings to discussion” of the original reading texts that are supplied by the CU. They are not intended to be authoritative or conclusive. They are contributions to discussion like any other such contributions. The introductions are not a substitute for the reading texts.*

---

### No Woman, No Revolution, Part 6



[Ray Alexander, 1913 - 2004](#)

## Organised as Working Women

We have seen, by working through the readings of Zetkin, Kollontai, Luxemburg, Lenin, the Comintern and the Women's Charter of the Federation of South African

Women (FEDSAW; otherwise called FSAW), that the class context, and also the South African liberation-movement context, makes the clear understanding of women's mass organisation very critical. Women's mass organisation is necessary, but it is not easy. The difficulties come mainly from within the movement.

To sum up: Women are not a separate class, which can be organised against men. Women are not exempt from class struggle, but are as divided by class as men are, and divided into the same classes as men are. Yet women, and working women in particular, do have a common basis for organisation as a distinct and self-conscious mass.

Today's text (see attached and the link below) is an excerpt from Cheryl Walker's 1982 book "Women and Resistance in South Africa". It concerns the position of FEDSAW in relation to the apartheid regime, and also in relation to the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL), in the period following FEDSAW's founding in 1954.

The ANCWL had been founded in 1948; and the ANC was an Africans-only organisation until the 1969 National Conference of the ANC in Morogoro, Tanzania. There was therefore an objective need to organise women on a wider basis than that of the ANCWL. They could have been organised separately, on racial lines, but in fact they chose to organise on non-racial lines.

Among the leaders were Ray Alexander, Dora Tamana, Josie Mphama, and Florence Matomela, who was awarded the Order of Luthuli in Gold in the 2014 Freedom Day honours list.

As we noted, the 1954 formation of FEDSAW, intended as a non-racial women's movement in South Africa, and the simultaneous adoption of the Women's Charter, prefigured the Congress of the People and the adoption of the Freedom Charter which happened in the following year, 1955.

All of that was to the good, but it is also clear from Walker's account that the relationship between FEDSAW and the ANCWL was problematic in the 1950s. It is equally clear that very similar problems continue, more than half a century later, to arise between, for example, the ANCWL and the Progressive Women's Movement (PWM) that was launched in August 2006. In the 1950s, and again in the 2000s, the question of whether to have individual membership, or not, was at issue. Here is some of what Walker has to say about this:

*"There were two alternatives. Either the FSAW could seek its own mass membership or it could base itself on a federal form, acquiring its members*

*indirectly through each of its affiliated member organisations. The matter was not settled at the inaugural conference. A draft constitution proposing the first alternative – a mass, individual membership – was circulated but failed to win overall approval. Ray Alexander, and later the NEC based in Cape Town, supported this constitution, but Ida Mtwana and, it would seem, the ANCWL in the Transvaal, wanted a federal structure.*

*“In opposing Alexander, Mtwana spoke on behalf of the Transvaal ANCWL, acting, apparently, on the instructions of the provincial ANC. Their main fear was that, if the FSAW were constituted on the basis of an individual membership, it would compete against the ANCWL to the detriment of the latter. In taking this position, the ANC revealed a degree of ambivalence towards the FSAW that it would never entirely overcome. While supporting and welcoming the entry of women into the national liberation movement, it was anxious to retain control over their activities – a control it could exercise effectively over the Women’s League but not so successfully over an independent FSAW.*

*“At the heart of the debate between these two alternatives there thus lay a matter of central importance – the relationship between the FSAW and ANC; the relationship between the women’s movement and the senior partner in the national liberation movement. The ANC was adamant on the issue and finally, reluctantly, the individual membership group yielded towards the end of 1954. They conceded not because they had been convinced by the other group’s arguments but because they realised that without the support of the ANC, the women’s movement would be isolated from the Congress Alliance.”*

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [FedSAW, NEC and Membership in 1955, Cheryl Walker, 1982.](#)
-



## ANC Women's League

*"[The ANC's] main fear was that, if the FSAW were constituted on the basis of an individual membership, it would compete against the ANCWL to the detriment of the latter. In taking this position, the ANC revealed a degree of ambivalence towards the FSAW that it would never entirely overcome."*

With these words of [Cheryl Walker's](#), we left the matter of the Federation of South African Women (FSAW or FEDSAW). Now we look at the ANC and its Women's League, founded in 1948. Women had been admitted to ANC membership for the first time five years earlier, in 1943.

The Short History of the ANCWL on its [web site](#) recalls the formation of FEDSAW as the major turning point for the League:

*"Organisationally, the Federation of South African Women, formed in 1954 as an umbrella body, helped the ANCWL's activities to spread. It was the first indication that the ANCWL wanted to be involved in improving the lot of women nationally, and not only within their own organisation. Federation brought together [women] from the ANCWL, Coloured People's Organisation, Transvaal and Natal Indian Congress of Democrats."*

From this writer's point of view, the ANC Women's League's sense of ownership, verging on entitlement of monopoly, is benign and not problematic. The formation

of FEDSAW was a stepping-stone, and FEDSAW's disappearance was not a problem, if the ANC WL's rise was a consequence of FEDSAW's demise, according to this view.

*"The impact of women's activities led the male leadership to recognise the potential of the women's struggle. Thus started the integration of women into ANC structures. In 1956 ANCWL President Lilian Ngoyi was elected the first women to join the ANC NEC."*

Lilian Ngoyi was President of both the League and the Federation at that time.

Women had been members of the ANC since 1943. Now, the male leadership "recognised the potential of the women's struggle," but for what? Did it recognise the potential of FEDSAW to organise something that could be as powerful as the ANC but independent from the ANC? And did they therefore seek to subordinate FEDSAW to the ANC, thereby killing FEDSAW?

Or, did it recognise and exploit the potential of women as a conservative force within the ANC?

Or, did it recognise women as a revolutionary force, and if so, what did the ANC do to maximise the revolutionary potential of the women?

See the document linked below for more of this history, and for relevant points from the current (2003) [ANCWL constitution](#). Here are some of them:

- *The Women's League is based on the policies and principles of the African National Congress.*
- *[Members must] Combat propaganda detrimental to the interests of the ANC and defend the policy and programmes of the ANCWL and the ANC;*
- *The Women's League is an integral part of the African National Congress and is part of its mobilising machinery.*
- *The ANCWL shall receive an annual budget, together with the supplementary grants for specific projects and tasks from the office of the Treasurer General of the ANC.*

It is very clear from the above that the ANC WL is intended by the drafters of this constitution to be a handmaiden of the ANC, without autonomy.

In the next session, we will look at the Progressive Women's Movement (PWM) and ask: Is the PWM supposed to be a subsidiary, or junior partner, of the ANCWL, and therefore of the ANC? Or is it a wider movement, open to all women, of which the ANCWL is only one part? To what extent have the problems and tensions of the FEDSAW period been solved, or have they not been solved? To what extent have those problems re-appeared, in fact, and with greater virulence than before?

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [ANCWL Short History, and points from 2003 ANCWL Constitution.](#)
-



Frene Ginwala



Sheila Meintjes

## **The Women's National Coalition**

and

## **The “Women's Charter for Effective Equality”**

In the history of women’s organisations in South Africa there have been many attempts to create enduring structures. The table below, compiled from searches on the Internet, lists some 15 of the principal ones.

Another source is a book. Twenty-four years after Cheryl Walker’s 1982 book “Women and Resistance in South Africa”, Shireen Hassim in 2006 produced “Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority”, published by University of Wisconsin Press. Useful parts of this book can be read through Google Books.

Hassim’s book contains a lot of detail on the way that these and other women’s organisations came about, who was involved, those relationships and problems that motivated their formation, and those that led to their demise.

Hassim notes that Walker’s book was well known to important actors during the UDF period (roughly, 1983-1990), when problems arose that were similar to those that Walker described as existing between the FSAW and the ANC Women’s League in the 1950s.

Among others, the table lists six different organisations that were formed between 1981 and 1991, not including the FSAW (Fedsaw), which was also the subject of an attempted revival. These seven attempts, which were not the only ones, corresponded in time with the rise and fall of the United Democratic Front, the UDF.

In addition, the ANC and the SACP were legalised in February, 1990, and the ANC Women's League was quick to return to the country and to re-establish itself.

Of all these, total eight, organisations, established or re-established in the country between 1981 and 1991, the only one that survives in 2013 is the ANC Women's League. None of the others survived beyond the early 1990s.

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Organisation</u>  | <u>Leaders</u>                                    |
|-------------|--|---|
| 1918        | <b>Bantu Women's League (BWL)</b>                              | Founded by Charlotte Maxeke                       |
| 1933        | <b>National Council of African Women (NCAW)</b>                | First President: Charlotte Maxeke                 |
| 1943        | The <b>ANC</b> officially admits women members                 | President, A B Xuma                               |
| 1948        | <b>ANC Women's League (ANCWL)</b>                              | Ida Mtwana, President                             |
| 1954        | <b>Federation of South African Women (FSAW)</b>                | Ray Alexander, Dora Tamana, Josie Mphama          |
| 1955        | <b>Black Sash</b> (Women's Defence of the Constitution League) | Jean Sinclair, Ruth Foley and others              |
| 1975        | <b>Black Women's Federation</b>                                | Fatima Meer, Winnie Mandela                       |
| 1981        | <b>The United Women's Organisation (UWO)</b>                   | Dora Tamana, Mildred Lesia, Amy Thornton          |
| 1983        | <b>Natal Organisation of Women (NOW)</b>                       | Phumzile Mlambo, Nozizwe Madlala, Victoria Mxenge |
| 1984        | <b>Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW)</b>                 | Sister Bernard Ncube, Jessie Duarte               |
| 1986        | <b>United Women's Congress (UWCO)</b>                          | From UWO  |
| 1987        | <b>Federation of South African Women (Fedsaw)</b> re-launch    | Cheryl Carolus, Secretary-General                 |
| 1987        | <b>The UDF Women's Congress</b>                                | Frances Baard                                     |
| 1991        | <b>Women's National Coalition (WNCSA)</b>                      | Frene Ginwala, Anne Letsepe, convenors            |
| 2006        | <b>Progressive Women's Movement (PWMSA)</b>                    | Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Mummy Japhta              |

The organisation that the attached and linked document relates to is the “**Women's National Coalition**”. It was a vehicle for intervention in the CODESA talks and for the creation of a set of demands or suggestions that were used to lobby the ANC prior to the 1994 elections, and then after the elections, as an input to the Constitution-writing process that followed.



The creation of the Women's National Coalition was driven by Frene Ginwala, who became Speaker of Parliament after the elections, and later by the academic Sheila Meintjes. The structure was more like an NGO (funded from Canada) than a democracy, and the method of collecting a mandate, described in the document as "focus groups", was a difficulty and occasioned acrimonious internal strife, according to Hassim.



FEDTRAW Calendar, 1987

The document includes a description found on the Internet, and the Women's National Coalition's "Women's Charter for Effective Equality", taken from the ANC web site. There is no reference to the original Women's Charter of 1954, or to the Federation of South African Women that created it, and which organised the women's march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1956. This conspicuous omission has continued to be common.

In between the mid-1990s when the Women's National Coalition faded, and 2006, there was no claimant to the status of a national South African women's organisation. In 2006 the Progressive Women's Movement was launched, claiming to fulfil the requirement. Whether it does so, or not, is the matter that is set out for examination in the next item of this part of the course.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Women's National Coalition and its Charter for Effective Equality](#).



## Progressive Women?

In relation to the previous text we asked: Is the Progressive Women's Movement (PWM) supposed to be a subsidiary of the ANC Women's League, and therefore a junior partner of the ANC? Or is the PWM a wider movement, open to all women, of which the ANCWL is only one part among many? To what extent have the problems and tensions of the FEDSAW period in the 1950s been solved? Or, have those problems not been solved?

The linked download is one document compiled of three documents. They are the PWM Base Document, the PWM Founding Document, and the PWM Declaration of 8 August 2006, from the founding gathering in Mangaung. All three documents were previously downloaded by the CU from a PWM page at the ANCWL web site, where the PWM logo, rather similar to that of the ANCWL, was displayed.

There was, in 2011, a separate PWM web site, at <http://pwmsa.org/>. On this new PWM web site, it said, among other things:

*"The Progressive Women's Movement of South Africa (PWMSA) is a Not-for-Profit Organisation registration number 051-728-NPO, launched in Bloemfontein on the 8th August 2006 to coincide with the 50th Anniversary of the 1956 march of 20 000 South African Women to the Union Buildings to protest against apartheid.*

*"After extensive discussions, as the ANCWL and Alliance partners we have agreed that a Women's Movement is a broad front of women's organisations, grassroots organisations of all kinds, feminist oriented*

*groups, researchers, faith based organisations, traditional healers, women involved in policy formulation and programmes.*

*“The Movement was launched to create a broad front for development for the women of South Africa - one that would enable women to speak with one voice to address their concerns using a single platform of action irrespective of race, class, religion, political and social standing.*

*“To date, membership of the movement comprises more than thirty-five national organisations and institutions that represent civil society, labour, faith-based, political parties, business, arts and culture and professional bodies, non-governmental organisations, political parties, professional bodies and faith based organisations.”*

A search of the new site did not reveal the list of the “more than thirty-five national organisations”. Perhaps this vital information will be coming later.

In a previous edition of this course “No Woman, No Revolution”, which has been run a number of times by the Communist University since 2006, we noted that on Thursday, 20 August 2009, the Progressive Women’s Movement’s third-anniversary banquet was featured on the SABC glamour-and-fashion programme, [Top Billing](#). It was a high-society occasion. The President of the Republic was a guest. Our picture is of President Jacob Zuma being interviewed by Top Billing during that PWM banquet. We noted that it was not clear who was the leader of the PWM on that occasion.

Now, on the new web site, the names of the Working Committee are given, and a physical address is given at 77 Fox Street, Johannesburg, [with other contact details](#).

The working committee members in 2011 were: **Ms. Baleka Mbete** (National Convener; Former Deputy President); Ms. Aziwe Magida; Ms. Gertrude Mtshweni; Dr. Gwen Ramokgopa (Deputy Minister, DoH); Ms. Lulama Nare; Ms. Maria Ntuli (Deputy Minister, DSD); Ms. Sylvia Stephens-Maziya; Ms. Zukiswa Ncitha.

The [PWM Base Document](#) says, among other things:

*“The ANC and the ANC WL... have held a view that there is a need for some kind of an organic structure that will take up broader issues of women in the South African Society.*

*"In October 2005 during one of its meetings the National Executive Committee of the Women's League decided it would be ideal if South African women to formalize a Progressive Women's Movement in 2006.*

*"After extensive discussions, as the ANCWL and Alliance partners we have agreed that a Women's Movement is a broad front of women's organisations, grassroots organisations of all kinds, feminist oriented groups, researchers, faith based organisations, traditional healers, women involved in policy formulation and programmes.*

***"Character of the PWM: Organic - not a formal structure.***

***"Objectives: Unite the women of South Africa in diversity; strengthen the relationship between the government and women's organisations."***

The Base Document therefore confirms that the PWM is an ANC initiative, that it is a combination of women's organisations, not individuals, that it shall be "organic" and "not a formal structure", and that its purpose is to bind the women to the government.

The [PWM Foundation Document](#) says, among other things:

*"Regular membership of the movement shall be open to any progressive South African women's organisation and formations that work with women that share the values and principles of the PWMSA.*

***"National Steering Committee, Selection and Tenure: National Conference shall identify sectors for representation to the steering committee. After the Conference of the PWMSA the previous committee in conjunction with the newly seconded members will convene a handing over meeting within a period of a month."***

[Steering Committee members are "identified" and "seconded". This formula is repeated at Provincial level. The word "elect", or "election", is never used. Terms are five years (National) and three years (Provincial).]

***"Powers and Duties of the National Steering Committee: The Steering Committee shall elect a **Convenor** and assign portfolios and responsibilities to the members of the Steering Committee; They shall carry out and monitor the decisions of the National Conference; They shall coordinate the establishment of Provincial Steering Committees"***

*“Committees: There shall be such other Committee(s) and ad hoc committees, as the Steering Committee may from time to time deem necessary; Each Committee shall have a **Coordinator**.*

*“At any **National Conference** the only business that shall be discussed shall be that which has been specified in the written request lodged by the members concerned, unless the Steering Committee in her discretion otherwise permits.*

*“The **Steering Committee** shall have the power to authorise expenditure on behalf of the Movement from time to time for the purposes of furthering the objectives of the Movement in accordance with such terms and conditions as the Member Organisation of the Steering Committee may direct. The monies of the Movement shall be deposited and disbursed in accordance with any Banking Resolution passed by the Steering Committee. Each member shall, on an annual basis pay dues for every five years.”*

It appears that in order to be “organic and not a formal structure”, the PWM was to be at least as tightly structured as a normal, constitutionally organised democratic body. The requirement to be “not a formal structure” is only attempted in this very formal document to the extent that although there is a Convenor and there are Coordinators, there are no Presidents, Chairpersons or Secretaries; that the basis of delegate status at conferences is not spelled out; and that there is selection, and secondment, but there are no elections.

Like FEDSAW in the 1950s, the PWM is not allowed to have a mass individual membership. It only has corporate members. Who they all are, is not yet public information.

There is a desire in some women, and men, to flee from the mass-democratic organisational forms that are normal to the labour movement, of the kind that were championed by other women like the late, great [Ray Alexander](#), for example. The desire to shun such democratic forms of mass organisation has a basis in the conflicted philosophy of feminism. It is related to the contradiction noted by [Alexandra Kollontai](#) a century ago, between bourgeois feminism, and working-class politics.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [PWM Base Document, Founding Document, and Declaration, 2006](#).
-





## Gender

Men and women are biologically different, but socially equal. Any differences that are attributed to men or to women that are not biological are called “Gender”. Discrimination between people on grounds of gender is wrong.

Opposition to gender-discrimination is not the entirety of women’s concerns. Opposition to gender-discrimination is a “human rights” matter that may be dealt with by law.

Women’s concerns as women go beyond opposition to gender-discrimination. Women should organise as women so as to become a free-willing collective subject that can act positively, and so do more than merely restore prescribed human rights.

Women organised democratically as women, and especially as working women, can be a revolutionary force. It is this revolutionary force of women that the communists need to bring into being.

The establishment of “gender desks” is not sufficient for revolutionary purposes. “Gender desks” can partially, but not completely, restore equal (bourgeois) rights to bourgeois women, but will not succeed in the task of mobilising proletarian women for the overthrow of capitalism, which is the only full emancipation available to them.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [What do we mean by 'Gender', Tweedie, 2012.](#)



## The Little Red Book

This is about the little book with the red plastic cover, which is not central to this course. But it is part of the history of ideas. [According to Wikipedia](#), it was published in a total printing of 1,055,498,000 copies, in many different languages.

That's more than a billion.

Chapter 31 is on Women. Among other things it says:

*"Unite and take part in production and political activity to improve the economic and political status of women."*

None of Mao's statements are "gendered".

Mao correctly places the question of male authority within a class and economic (political economy) context.

Mao's form of propaganda is reminiscent of the kind that Clara Zetkin advocated: Well-produced, but short, and capable of being read by everybody.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Little Red Book, Chapter 31 on Women, Mao, 1966](#).



[Lindsey German](#) in 2009

## Patriarchy

In South Africa, in 2012, “Patriarchy” theory is orthodox. It is politically correct, and government ministers and trade union leaders feel free to denounce patriarchy without fear of contradiction.

Patriarchy doctrine says that men have an innate prejudice against women that causes them to treat women badly. This contradicts the other principal orthodoxy related to women, which is Gender theory.

To say that men have an innate prejudice is to attribute to men a characteristic that is not biological. Hence, patriarchy doctrine is prejudice. It is gender bias. Patriarchy doctrine is sexism.

Lindsey German is a renowned leader of the peace movement in Britain. She is the convenor of the **Stop the War Coalition**, an alliance that involves the Communist Party of Britain as well as Lindsey German’s former organisation (she has now resigned from it), the Socialist Workers’ Party.

Lindsey German rejected the theory of patriarchy more than 30 years ago.

The article attached and linked below is from 1981 but it is not out of date. It will not offend all supporters of patriarchy-theory, because, as German points out, there are many different definitions of the word. But it will upset some, if they read it.



German focuses on the kind of patriarchy-theory that holds that all men benefit from the oppression of all women, where this is taken as a natural, or given, state of affairs.

Lindsey German sets quotations from Karl Marx against these ideas to show that they are not compatible with history.

She shows how the modern conditions of women were not inevitable but arose in the circumstances of capitalism.

*"I would argue therefore that not only do men not benefit from women's work in the family (rather the capitalist system as a whole benefits), but also that it is not true that men and capital are conspiring to stop women having access to economic production,"* says German.

*"The question the theorists of patriarchy have to answer is this – if capital and men are indeed in alliance why are women not being thrown out of work and replaced by unemployed miners, steelworkers and dockers?"* asks German.

German concludes: *"Theories of patriarchy are not in fact theories of women's liberation. Instead of starting with an assessment of the material position of women in capitalist society, they start with crude biological assessments of the positions of men and women. They point no way forward for women's liberation."*

...and asks: *"Why then have they become so popular?"*

She points out that patriarchy-theory *"demands theoretical correctness from the few while accepting inaction by the many."* This is exactly the situation in South Africa today, more than 30 years after German wrote her essay.

In the end, only the abolition of class division can do away with the oppression of and discrimination against women.

Those women who would rather not think about class, are the ones who make patriarchy-theory popular.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Theories of Patriarchy, Lindsey German, 1981.](#)



## Women, Race and Class

Angela Davis is well known but hard to summarise. She is certainly a scholar. She is also a holder of the Lenin Peace Prize from the Soviet Union, and she was twice a US Vice-Presidential candidate on behalf of the CPUSA. *[The image is a Cuban poster for Angela].*

[This link](#) takes you to an interview that Angela Davis did with Gary Younge of the Guardian (London) in 2007, during a trip which also took her to Johannesburg, as recorded by the [CU here](#).

[This link](#) takes you to the Angela Davis page on Wikipedia, where, as usual, there are more links, including those at the bottom of the page.

Chapter 13 from Angela Davis's 1981 book, *Women, Race and Class*, linked below, is to a large extent a polemic against the Wages for Housework Movement of that time, led by Mariarosa Dalla Costa in Italy.

Davis tackles the matter of housework first, arguing for a communist solution to the drudgery of child care, domestic cleaning, food preparation, and laundry.

She shows that the current situation of women is historically recent in origin, and that the repression of women coincides in historical development of human society with the appearance of private property, quoting Engels' "[Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State](#)". Davis reports on her 1973 interaction with the Masai people of Tanzania, where there was still division of labour between the sexes that was "complementary as opposed to hierarchical," according to Davis.

Davis recounts, in her own way, the nature of the capitalist wages system, where money is only paid for the survival or continued availability of labour power, and nothing at all is paid for the expropriated product of labour. Davis also records aspects of the South African apartheid system of exploitation, which was still in full force at that time.

In her concluding paragraph Davis says: "The only significant steps toward ending domestic slavery have in fact been taken in the existing socialist countries." In other words, wages for housework under capitalism is an ineffective gimmick; the real solution to women's problems in society can only come from changing society.

The Communist University is suggesting that the democratic organisation of women in the same kind of way as workers are organised, so that their organisation is a component of democracy and is not outside of democracy, is the only way that women can form a collective purpose.

Wages for housework is not a major issue in South Africa at the present time.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Working-Class Perspective on Housework, Davis, Women, Race and Class, 1981](#).**
-



[Valentina Tereshkova](#)

## Caste, Class or Sex?

Evelyn Reed is the author of the 1975 book “Woman’s Evolution”. Unfortunately it is not on the Internet. “Women - Caste, Class or Oppressed Sex” (1970), the essay attached and linked below, contains some of the ideas that were included in the longer work.

Our picture today is of [Valentina Tereshkova](#), the first woman in space, from the Soviet Union, on 16 June 1963.

Reed writes of “the downfall of women” as if it was a single historic event, which, from the point of view of the “metropolitan” or advanced capitalist countries, it appears to be. Of course Reed was aware, like [Engels](#), that there were still contemporary societies existing on earth which had not yet experienced, or fully experienced, the full downfall of women. The downfall has in practice been a long cascade, which is not yet at an end.

The downfall of women is real. It corresponds exactly with the arrival of class-divided society, with its institutions of the patriarchal family, private property and state power. This is what Engels expressed so clearly in 1884, following on from the work of Henry Morgan and Karl Marx. Evelyn Reed does not contradict Engels, but her work opened up the story in more detail.

In “Woman’s Evolution” Reed shows how nearly all the productive technologies that humans still use today for basic survival, from horticulture and animal husbandry to pottery, weaving and leatherwork, and including building, and the use of fire, originated in the sphere of the women, which was the human settlement itself.

In this short essay, Reed makes the basic case for the historical and materialist view of human life, from which proceeds an integrated understanding of the entire society of men and women together, and the consequent necessity for socialism. After that, she contrasts and compares with some of her contemporary opponents of forty years ago, whose arguments were similar to those of the bourgeois feminists of today in South Africa. Here are some excerpts from the essay:

*“Under the clan system of the sisterhood of women and the brotherhood of men there was no more possibility for one sex to dominate the other than there was for one class to exploit another. Women occupied the most eminent position because they were the chief producers of the necessities of life as well as the procreators of new life.”*

*“Woman’s overthrow went hand in hand with the subjugation of the mass of toiling men to the master class of men.”*

*“Women, then, have been condemned to their oppressed status by the same social forces and relations which have brought about the oppression of one class by another, one race by another, and one nation by another. It is the capitalist system - the ultimate stage in the development of class society - which is the fundamental source of the degradation and oppression of women.”*

*“...to say that women form a separate caste or class must logically lead to extremely pessimistic conclusions with regard to the antagonism between the sexes in contrast with the revolutionary optimism of the Marxists. For, unless the two sexes are to be totally separated, or the men liquidated, it would seem that they will have to remain forever at war with each other. As Marxists we have a more realistic and hopeful message. We deny that women’s inferiority was predestined by her biological makeup or has always existed.”*

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Women - Caste, Class or Oppressed Sex?, Reed, 1970.](#)



Is freedom female?

## What's Freedom got to do with Women?

This course, “No Woman, No Revolution”, problematises the necessity of involving women, who are more than one-half of humanity, in any possible proletarian revolution against capitalism.

The proletarian revolution, as much as the National Democratic Revolution that precedes it, is a struggle for freedom, conforming to the slogan “Power to the People”.

In that sense, the entire 16 courses of the Communist University are “about” freedom. Communism itself is all about freedom. The revolutionary Christopher Caudwell called freedom “the good that contains all other goods”. One could presume that there are no opponents to this view. Countless writings praising freedom, and works of art like the colossal Statue of Liberty in New York, USA, seem to deny the possibility of any other view. Freedom is for women as much as for men.

But in fact, as soon as the appeal to freedom becomes effective in securing support for the struggle for socialism, bourgeois thinkers and writers find ways to abandon it, and even to condemn it.

We now come across this phenomenon – the refusal of freedom – in the matter of women’s power in society, just as we have come across it elsewhere in relation to the liberation of Africa from colonialism.

For an example of the latter, the first President of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, discusses the “negritude” that the first President of Senegal, Léopold Sédar Senghor believed in, as follows:

*‘Senghor has, indeed, given an account of the nature of the return to Africa. His account is highlighted by statements using some of his own words: that the African is "a field of pure sensation"; that he does not measure or observe, but "lives" a situation; and that this way of acquiring "knowledge" by confrontation and intuition is "negro-African"; the acquisition of knowledge by reason, "Hellenic". In African Socialism [London and New York, 1964, pp.72-3], he [Senghor] proposes “that we consider the Negro-African as he faces the Other: God, man, animal, tree or pebble, natural or social phenomenon. In contrast to the classic European, the Negro-African does not draw a line between himself and the object, he does not hold it at a distance, nor does he merely look at it and analyse it. After holding it at a distance, after scanning it without analysing it, he takes it vibrant in his hands, careful not to kill or fix it. He touches it, feels it, smells it. The Negro-African is like one of those Third Day Worms, a pure field of sensations... Thus the Negro-African sympathises, abandons his personality to become identified with the Other, dies to be reborn in the Other. He does not assimilate; he is assimilated. He lives a common life with the Other; he lives in a symbiosis.”*

*‘It is clear that socialism cannot be founded on this kind of metaphysics of knowledge.’*

Kwame Nkrumah, “African Socialism Revisited”, 1967

In similar fashion to Senghor, when confronted with the possibility of freedom and power, the philosopher [Judith Butler](#) rejects it. For Butler, power is an unwanted, male imposition. Similarly, for Senghor, subjective freedom is “Hellenic” and therefore to be rejected because it is identified with the colonial oppressor.

We have seen three contradictions that are active in the world of feminism. One is between the bourgeois and the proletarian feminists. The second is between the organised and the structureless. The third is between the search for freedom, and its contrary: rejection of autonomy.



All of these contradictions are related. As in others among the CU courses, we have to conclude that the resolution of such contradictions requires philosophy, and not just any philosophy but the most powerful, avant-guard kind of philosophy.

[James Heartfield](#)'s 2002 work, "The Death of the Subject Explained" is a strong book that deals with the fundamental question of all philosophy: the relation of mind to matter. In it, Heartfield debunks all kinds of anti-rational, anti-humanist philosophy, including post-Modernism, and in the attached extract, he counters the anti-humanist feminism of Butler and others.

Humanist simply means acceptance that the combined ability to observe, think, plan and act is the unique attribute of human beings, and is also the source of human morality.

The very first words of matured Marxism – Karl Marx's 1845 "Theses on Feuerbach" – deal with this fundamental question of subject and object, mind and matter. The first sentence of Thesis 1 on Feuerbach is:

*"The main defect of all hitherto-existing materialism — that of Feuerbach included — is that the Object, actuality, sensuousness, are conceived only in the form of the object, or of contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively."*

Suffice it to say that Marx here shows his principal concern, which never wavered or varied, namely: the priority of human freedom. So long as we remain Marxists, we would have to insist on freedom as our goal, as the goal of humanity, and as the goal of women.

Whereas bourgeois feminists like Butler and others quoted by Heartfield have ended up opposing freedom.

On this kind of feminism Heartfield concludes:

*"What began as a criticism of the monopoly over freedom exercised by men has turned, paradoxically, into a criticism of freedom as such."*

We can also say, paraphrasing Nkrumah: 'It is clear that revolution cannot be founded on this kind of metaphysics of knowledge.'

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Heartfield, On Feminists on The Subject, 2002](#).





[Meera Nanda](#)

## Women's Power

During this course we have looked at the “woman’s question” in a practical way. Especially we have said that it is a revolutionary necessity that the women should be organised *en masse* in order that they should become a collective “Subject of History”. But we have not extensively examined this thing called “Subject of History” during this particular course.

Simply, being a “Subject of History” means having the power to act, as in the revolutionary slogan “Power to the People!” It means being free. It means having “agency”.

The item linked below is “Postmodernism and Hindu Nationalism” by [Meera Nanda](#) [pictured]. This piece of writing can help readers to understand how, in a triple context of philosophy, national liberation and feminism, the crucial or pivotal point of struggle is usually exactly this question of agency.

Meera Nanda is a secular rational humanist philosopher in general, and an expert on Hindu nationalism, bourgeois feminism and anti-humanist postmodernism in particular.

Postmodernist philosophy, reactionary nationalism and mystical feminism all bear down upon the concept of freedom, attempting to crush it. All try to return the people in general, and women in particular, to a condition of relentless bondage and victimhood of circumstances.

What is common to all of these aspects, whether in India or in South Africa, is the evacuation of popular agency and the refusal of the mass Subject of History following the liberation struggle, which in the case of both India and South Africa promised precisely this thing - freedom - above all other things.

In India the promise was named “[Swaraj](#)” and in South Africa, “Power to the People”. Independence and national sovereignty were supposed to be inseparable from mass popular agency, and *vice versa*.

In practice, political independence co-existed with bourgeois dictatorship and neo-colonialism, and these latter factors trumped and negated the mass popular power, including organised women’s power.

Revolutionary organs of people’s power were dismantled. Golden Calves were raised up in place of the slogans of popular power. These substitutes were the slogans of bourgeois nationalism, national mystique, women’s solidarity versus men, and the cult that holds inanimate things (the earth, the environment) to be not only opposed to, but also more valuable than, humanity.

In all cases the best remedy for such errors will be as prescribed by the SACP:  
**Educate, Organise and Mobilise.**

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Postmodernism, Hindu nationalism, Vedic science, Nanda, 2004](#).
-



## SACP on Women's Day

Jenny Schreiner is a member of the SACP 13<sup>th</sup> Congress Central Committee. The attached and linked document was written by her for publication in the Umsebenzi Online that came out on 8 August 2012, on the eve of National Women's Day.

Schreiner says, before aptly quoting Lenin:

*"The rights protected in the [South African] Constitution are rights that all women can claim, but they are not yet rights that all women, particularly working class women, are living. The equality in law and rights does not automatically translate into equality in access to jobs, resources, and protection."*

Summing up the situation of women in South Africa and the way forward, Schreiner says:

*"The material base of women's emancipation has to be in the integration of women into the economy without gender discrimination, the equalising of the gender division of labour within the household and addressing social and political gender equity."*

Schreiner says:

*"...the struggle for women's emancipation is a struggle within a struggle and one that touches both the personal and the political."*

This is discussed in terms of working women's possibilities or lack thereof, where:

*"Work and activity outside the home is premised on an inequality between men and women defined by their household or domestic responsibilities."*

Schreiner then refers to Alexandra Kollontai, whose writing we have already studied in this course. Schreiner writes in a passage that helps us considerably in terms of the way that our course is problematised:

*"Alexandra Kollontai identified that the social basis of women's oppression lies in class relations and private ownership of the means of production and appropriation. She discussed whether there was a basis for a cross-class women's movement. She argued that working class women will more easily identify in struggle alongside their working class menfolk than to side with bourgeois women against men."*

*"This is an important issue for the Party to engage with, particularly in the context of the Progressive Women's Movement."*

*"It should be clear that the hegemony of the working class and its organisation in all sites of struggle is weakened if working class women are excluded from that organisation."*

*"However it is equally important for working class women to assert working class leadership of the progressive women's forces in society and form allies amongst the multi-class strata in the liberation movement. The experience of relative discrimination by women across classes provides a unique opportunity for women of the middle classes to be mobilised in support of working class women's interests, and thereby become aware of working class issues."*

Schreiner lays out all the possible permutations, except one. Working class women can organise in concert with working class men. They can also organise across class lines to create class alliance with middle-class women.

The third possibility, the one that Schreiner rightly or wrongly omits, is the organisation of working women as such.

The three possibilities are not mutually exclusive. It is not unreasonable to go for all three kinds of organisation.

It is reasonable to omit the possibility of a working women's movement, that is a dedicated working-class women's movement, if it is regarded as a practical impossibility. This is something to discuss.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Schreiner, Umsebenzi Online, Impact on Women, 2012](#).
- 

No Woman, No Revolution, Part 10a

## UMSEBENZI ONLINE

### Umsebenzi Online on Women

Umsebenzi Online is the South African Communist Party's weekly e-mail newsletter. The [Umsebenzi Online archive](#) is on the SACP web site. You can subscribe to it (free) from the [Umsebenzi Online distribution-group web site](#), or by using the Umsebenzi Online promotion box near the top of the right-hand panel on the [Communist University blog](#), or in the left-hand panel on the [SACP web site](#).

You can use the same promotion box ([or this one](#)) to invite anybody to be on the Umsebenzi Online list. Just put an e-mail address in the box and click "Subscribe". An e-mail will go to that address, inviting the person to click to confirm that the she or he wants to subscribe. It's quick and convenient.

Umsebenzi Online is the SACP's authentic voice. It often carries an article by the elected SACP General Secretary, currently **Dr Blade Nzimande**.

To complete the picture of the women's movement that the CU has tried to provide in our ten-part "[No Woman, No Revolution](#)" set, the last main document (attached, and linked below) consists of four articles published in Umsebenzi Online since the beginning of 2006.

2006 was the year when the CU did its first "No Woman, No Revolution" series, from February to May of that year, meeting at the Women's Jail, Constitution Hill. August 2006 was when we saw the launch of the "Progressive Woman's Movement", something different and opposite in character from what the Communist University had imagined was needed.

Here are some speculative theses on the question of women in South Africa:

- Women, as such, have no interests that are antagonistic to those of men, but women have a common and particular felt experience among themselves, as women, of the oppression that capitalism has brought to their lives.
  - Therefore there is a basis for working women to organise as a mass, by which is meant a small or large number of people who feel a common disadvantage in society, and who in consequence organise themselves together for their mutual collective good and combined self-defence.
  - Women's mass organisations have the same requirement as trade unions and political-vanguard organisations, to be both democratic and centralist. Therefore women's organisations should have individual membership and branches, hold periodic national congresses, have corporate personality, and have a constitution to ensure democracy.
  - The SACP, as a vanguard political organisation of the working class, is designed to relate to such mass organisations, just as it relates to trade union organisations, and others.
  - As a matter of historical fact, the ANC, through the ANCWL, has on at least four successive occasions since its founding in 1948, acted to ensure that the above kind of democratic, mass, individual-membership general-purpose women's movement could not flourish. The ANCWL, under pressure from the ANC, blighted FEDSAW, then the UDF women's structures, then the Women's National Coalition, and it now blights the Progressive Women's Movement.
  - The ANC adopted "non-sexism" in the 1980s, and the current South African Constitution is non-sexist, but in practice these provisions mean little as compared to the material non-existence of a mass women's movement that has membership and democracy, and which is politically aligned to the working class and to the cause of socialism.
  - Very little of the above is discussed in the general public realm. What discussion there may be is often based on unexamined bourgeois-feminist, eclectic and post-modernist precepts. The situation is, on the face of it, much the same as it was ten years ago in mid-2005, when the Communist University began to put together its first "No Woman, No Revolution" series.
  - Yet great gains have been made. One was the election, in December 2007 at Polokwane, of an ANC National Executive Committee of 84 members of which 50% were women. Another was the announcement in 2009 by the SACP GS that the YCLSA has a membership that is more than 50% female.
  - **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Umsebenzi Online on Women, 2006-2009](#).**
-



## President Zuma, Speech to the PWM, 2012

This document is included as a further assistance in examining the questions as previously put:

*“Is the Progressive Women’s Movement (PWM) supposed to be a subsidiary of the ANC Women’s League, and therefore a junior partner of the ANC? Or is the PWM a wider movement, open to all women, of which the ANCWL is only one part among many? To what extent have the problems and tensions of the FEDSAW period in the 1950s been solved? Or, have those problems not been solved?”*

In the attached and linked speech to the PWM the President certainly does not directly address these questions. It is even quite hard to see, during many passages of the speech, where they refer to women and women’s organisation, at all.

Among many other things, the President said the following:

*“To further promote the legislative environment, we are to fast-track the Gender Equality Bill. This progressive Bill will promote the prohibition and elimination of discriminatory religious practises, and eliminate discrimination in access to socio-economic rights.*

*“It will seek to prohibit harmful traditional practises. It will help eliminate and prohibit discrimination in employment and other opportunities for women.*



*“The provisions of the Bill also already talk to the need for the participation of women in the economy and also full economic emancipation for women.*

*“The legislation alone will not achieve our goals. This means that all of us, men and women, must actively work to promote women’s rights as human rights.*

*“It means that the Progressive Women’s Movement must work with relevant government departments on an on-going basis to promote development and women’s emancipation.*

*“What is important is that all these new or amended laws and protocols indicate that the commitment exists and that we are moving forward with the promotion of gender equality. Some progress has been made already in many areas.”*

Read and discuss the document, comrades.

Apart from the above, President Zuma also, in the same period of time in 2012, made a speech in memory of Charlotte Maxeke, which is [on the ANC web site](#), and another on the occasion of the 56<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1956, Women’s March to the Union Buildings, which is also National Women’s Day. The latter speech is attached and linked below.

These are the last documents in our course, “No Woman, No Revolution”.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Speech to the Progressive Women's Movement, President Jacob Zuma, 2012](#); [Speech on National Women’s Day 2012](#).
- 

**Course: No Woman, No Revolution**

**14002, No Woman, No Revolution, Intro Booklet 2 of 2**

8331 words